

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 IGA-02 FDRE-00 IO-11

SAM-01 /084 W

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R 120615Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9967

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 1268

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN

SUBJ: PLAYING UP FARAKKA

SUMMARY. THE GOVERNMENT AND PRESS OF BANGLADESH CONTINUE AN EXTENSIVE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN TO KEEP FARAKKA BEFORE THE PUBLIC. GIVEN SPECIAL ATTENTION HAVE BEEN THE STATEMENTS MADE AT HOME AND ABROAD BY B.M. ABBAS, PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR FOR FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER RESOURCES, WHO CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN THAT DISCUSSIONS WITH INDIAN SHOULD COVER THE WHOLE YEAR'S FLOW OF THE GANGES. WEDNESDAY'S DIPLOMATIC TOUR BY AIR OF FARAKKA-AFFECTED AREAS RECEIVED THE ANTICIPATED PUBLICITY IN THE PRESS MARCH 11 UNDER SUCH HEADLINES AS "SAND, SHOALS ALL THE WAY FROM ARICHA TO GODAGARI." HARDLY A DAY HAS GONE BY THIS MONTH WITHOUT LENGTHY ARTICLES, EDITORIALS AND PHOTOGRAPHS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT FARAKKA BARRAGE IS THREATENING THE OPERATION OF POWER STATIONS AND MILLS. KILLING OFF THE FISH IN THE RIVERS, DESTROYING THE ECOLOGY OF THE SUNDERBANS, DEPRIVING THE IRRI CROPS OF IRRIGATION WATERS, AND DISRUPTING FERRY SERVICES. END SUMMARY.

1. BANGLADESH'S PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN ON FARAKKA BARRAGE HAS
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BEEN B.M. ABBAS, PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR FOR FLOOD CONTROL AND

WATER RESOURCES. IN A WIDELY PUBLICIZED AIRPORT INTERVIEW UPON HIS RETURN TO DACCA MARCH 7 FROM WASHINGTON, B.M. ABBAS DENIED THAT BANGLADESH HAD REFUSED TO TALK WITH INDIA ABOUT THE FARAKKA ISSUE. HE REPEATED THE BDG ARGUMENT THAT IT IS INDIA WHICH IS MAKING THE TALKS CONDITIONAL BY INSISTING THAT THEY COVER ONLY THE MID-MARCH TO MID-MAY DRY SEASON. BANGLADESH WANTS TO BSSCUSS THE WHOLE YEAR'S FLOW AND, ABBAS ADDED, ALLOCATION OF THE WATERS SHOULD BE MADE FOR 10-DAY PERIODS IN THE D ZEAASON AND MONTH BY MONTH FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR. ABBAS AGAIN REJECTED THE INDIAN SUGGESTION OF A LINK CANAL BETWEEN THE GANGES AND BRAHMAPUTRA IN BANGLADESH.

2. ABBAS SAID THAT HE HAD PRESENTED THE BANGLADESH SIDE OF THE ISSUE EXTENSIVELY IN THE UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM, AND UN AGENCIES. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAD HAD "VERY USEFUL AND ENCOURAGING TALKS" WITH ROBERT MCNAMARA OF THE WORLD BANK AND THAT THE BANK HAD AGREED TO ASSIST BANGLADESH MORE ACTIVELY IN WATER RESOURCE PROJECTS. AN IBRD DIRECTOR IS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN DACCA MARCH 16 FOR PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS, ACCORDING TO ABBAS. WHILE INSISTING THAT THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM FOR BANGLADESH IS THE CURRENT WITHDRAWALS THROUGH THE FARAKKA, ABBAS NEVERTHELESS SAID THAT HE HAS SUGGESTED THAT NEPAL, INDIA, AND BANGLADESH AS CO-RIPARIAN STATES DECIDE THE USES OF THE GANGES WATER, AND THAT INDIA, BANGLADESH AND CHINA SHOULD SIMILARLY COOPERATE IN THE UTILIZATION OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA.

3. THE DACCA PRESS ALSO GAVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO COMMENTS ABBAS MADE WHILE IN WASHINGTON AND LONDON. THE MARCH 7 PRESS PRINTED THE TEXT OF A STATEMENT ABBAS MADE TO VOA FEBRUARY 29 AND MARCH 8 PUBLISHED THE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF A BBD INTERVIEW ABBAS GAVE IN LONDON MARCH 4.

4. THE PRESS HAS ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE RECENT DEMAND BY FOUR ANTI-INDIAN LEFTIST POLITICAL LEADERS THAT THE FARAKKA ISSUE BE REFERRED TO THE UN BECAUSE INDIA'S "NAKED INTERFERENCE ON THE RIGHT OF RIPARIAN COUNTRIES" WAS A SIGN OF THE "AGRESSIVE DESIGN...AND ADVERSE ATTITUDE" OF THE GOI TOWARD RECENT POLITICAL CHANGES IN BANGLADESH. SOMEWHAT CONFIDENTIAL

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MILDER IN HIS REACTIONS HAS BEEN MAULANA BHASHANI WHO LAST WEEK COMPLETED A TOUR OF THE NORTHERN AND WESTERN BORDER AREAS. IN SEVERAL SPEECHES, BHASHANI CALLED FOR HIGH LEVEL TALKS BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND INDIA AND INVITED MRS. GANDHI TO COME TO SEE THE EFFECTS OF FARAKKA IN BANGLADESH. OTHER PROMINENT BANGALEES HAVE REFRAINED FROM PUBLIC COMMENT ALTHOUGH VARIOUS LOCAL BAR ASSOCIATIONS AND CIVIC GROUPS HAVE ISSUED STATEMENTS EXPRESSING CONCERN.

5. MOST OF THE ATTENTION GIVEN FARAKKA HAS CONCENTRATED ON ITS PHYSICAL EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY OF BANGLADESH. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS NOW CLAIMED THAT THE LEVEL OF THE GANGES AT THE INTAKE CANAL POWER HOUSE OF THE GANGES-KOBADAK IRRIGATION PROJECT ON MARCH 10 WAS 17.2 FEET, THE MINIMUM EVER RECORDED BEFORE, THUS THREATENING THE OPERATION OF THE IRRIGATION PROJECT. SIMILAR STATISTICS ARE PUT FORTH REGARDING THE THREATS TO THE OPERATIONS OF VARIOUS POWZ STATIONS, MILL, PORTS AND FERRY SERVICES DUE TO EITHER LOW WATER LEVELS OR SALINITY.

6. THE BDG ATTRACTED SOME 8 TO 10 AMBASSADORS (INCLUDING TWO OF THE SEVEN WARSAW PACT MISSION HEADS) PLUS REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER MISSIONS TO ITS SPECIAL TOUR BY AIR OF THE GANGES; THEY WERE ACCOMPANIED BY FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN AND B.M. ABBAS AND WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD OFFICIALS. U.S., U.K. AND SOVIET EMBASSIES WERE AMONG THE SEVERAL NOT REPRESENTED. THE INDIAN DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER ALSO PARTICIPATED AND, WE UNDERSTAND, USED THE OPPORTUNITY IN SIDE CONVERSATIONS TO PRESENT INDIA'S SIDE OF THE ISSUE TO HIS COLLEAGUES. THE TOUR WAS OBVIOUSLY PART OF BDG'S EFFORTS TO ENLIST THE SYMPATHY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND TO BRING PRESSURE ON THE GOI.

7. IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF TALKS SOON, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY THE EVENING OF MARCH 10 TOLD THE AMBASSADOR IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE INDIANS MIGHT BE CLOSE TO MAKING A GESTURE THAT MIGHT PERMIT TALKS TO GO FORWARD. HOWEVER, INDIAN FIRST SECRETARY R. SEN TOLD AN EMOFF THE SAME EVENING THAT THE BDG'S TACTICS WERE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE

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AND THE GOI WOULD NOT RESPOND TO PRESSURE.
BOSTER

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